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# LibGuides Undergraduate Focus Groups

Desai, Shevon

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# **Usability Report Cover Sheet**

	LibGuides Usability Task Force
Project	Undergraduate Student Focus Groups
Committee & Members	Usability Group: Suzanne Chapman (chair), Shevon Desai, Kat Hagedorn, Julie Piacentine, Ken Varnum Usability Task Force: Shevon Desai (co-convener), Julie Piacentine (co-convener), Barbara Beaton, Jennifer Bonnet, Bill Dueber, Karen Reiman-Sendi (stakeholder) Report Author(s): Shevon Desai
Report Info	Contact Information: <a href="mailto:shevonad@umich.edu">shevonad@umich.edu</a> Report Date: September 2009
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# Usability Report

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## Introduction

A. LibGuides is a commercial, web-based content management system used to present the library's various subject and technology-based guides. Librarians can quickly and easily create guides to resources in a simple, modular format. LibGuides provides "boxes" in different content format types, designed to better display certain types of information (for example: links of web resources, RSS feeds, or delicious tags).

The MLibrary implementation of LibGuides includes guides created by various libraries. These range from basic subject-based information (such as a guide to film and video studies resources), to technology guides (RefWorks), and course-related guides (American Culture 405). Currently, there are a few basic guidelines provided to librarians about creating a guide, but without a required template, guides can vary widely.

B. The goal for this test was not to look at specific design or functionality features of LibGuides, but to better understand the research habits of undergraduate students.\* With this information in hand we hoped to set the foundation for additional future testing. We

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\* This report describes a usability assessment performed by the MLibrary Usability Group and Task Force. Usability assessment is a part of the iterative design process used to develop new systems and services at MLibrary. This report describes one test in a series of tests performed at one point in the iterative design process. Sample sizes are small and findings serve only as clues to help guide decisions. Implementation of any recommendations should take these limitations into account.

wanted to find out with which resources they begin their research, how they use (or do not use) library resources, whether they would use a subject or course-based guide, and what their general expectations are of such guides.

## **Test Description & Methodology**

### **Test Description**

Focus group participants were guided in discussions of how they go about research and what they want from research guides. Discussion was guided by a moderator working loosely from a script of questions and asking follow-up questions as appropriate.

### **Methodology**

- Test method: Focus groups; 2 sessions, each 1.5 hours in duration
- Number of participants: 14; 8 in the first session and 6 in the second session
- Method(s) of participant recruitment: Contacted New Student Orientation program leaders in person and via email; Distributed recruitment email to departments through subject selectors
- Participants signed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent form (which included authorization for audio recording)
- Recording methods: audio recorder, observers' notes

### **Results**

The 14 undergraduates who participated in our focus groups came from a variety of academic majors and ranged in status from sophomores to seniors. Two identified themselves as transfer students, and two identified as international students. While it is difficult to make broad generalizations based on a discussion amongst a small group of students, there appeared to be consensus (that is several of the participants concurred) on some discussion areas:

- Students begin their research in a variety of ways, but Google and Wikipedia are widely used tools.

*“Google is definitely a good place to start... to get some grasp on the material.”*

*“The Internet is just so easy and it’s always just right there — Wikipedia, Google — it’s just so easy.”*

*“I’m going to normally use Google to find key terms... to find 4 or 5 terms that I’m fairly confident will show up in whatever database I’m searching in.”*

*"Frankly, I use Wikipedia first. Obviously, I don't use it as a 'source' but can use the bibliography for credible sources."*

- If students were aware of existence of such library guides, they would use them.
- Students use the resources to which instructors direct them (including librarians in course-related instruction).
- Students preferred to have recommended resources at the top of an appropriate guide.
- CTools is widely used; a couple of students commented that CTools is "always open" when studying and one student said that he/she uses CTools to access library resources.
- "Research guide" is not a meaningful phrase to students

*"[Research guide] would be how to use the system for research."*

*"I would assume this was tips on research."*

- Having contact information for the library/librarians on the guides is important; more than one student commented that they wanted to be able to ask questions of a real person if needed.
- The link to the library website from the university gateway (<http://www.umich.edu>) is also important; several students indicated that rather than bookmark the library site, they use the links on the university site. This may be one additional reason for students' confusion between the Mirlyn catalog and the library website; a direct link to Mirlyn is included within the university's "Quick Links" section on [umich.edu](http://www.umich.edu).

There was **not** a consensus on many issues. Some of these issues are:

- A meaningful label to describe subject/research guides

*"I never knew what that [guides] was."*

*"I wouldn't know what that was or click it."*

*"Sounds vague."*

Labels suggested by students included: cheat sheet, recommended resources, "start here," suggested resources, short cuts, and study materials

- "Interactive" features within a guide, such as rankings, comments, videos, etc.

Several students said that they would want to see and/or leave comments about particular resources. One student said that students are used to "constantly weighing in with our opinions" and another indicated that it is important to show that the library is seeking the opinions of students. However, others said that comments are very distracting, and another commented that *"those links [interactive links] annoy me; if I'm doing research, I just want to do research."* Another student said that links to things like YouTube videos are okay only if they are relevant to the subject.

- Social networking tools

Students seem to have differing opinions about their comfort level with the library having a presence on social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter. Some students commented that if they are using Facebook, they are not interested in doing research (this in answer to whether they would search Mirlyn from within Facebook). However, another student pointed out that since they are online in Facebook anyway, they might as well contact the library from within that environment, cutting out an unnecessary layer.

- Labeling, branding, findability

Students in these focus groups seemed to have had very little experience with library research guides. In some cases, they may have been using a research guide (in the examples below, we believe the students were referring to the Communication Studies guide), but did not know or necessarily associate the guide with the library.

This lack of context on the part of participants highlights problems with labeling, branding, and findability:

*"Comm has that whole special Comm search thing... Is it a Ctools page?"  
"I think it's on the Mirlyn web site. You can click... your concentration and there's a full web site that's Communications."*

*"Basically, they just link to various search engines that we might find useful because they search... media things, ...things we would most likely use."*

## **Recommendations**

- **Further usability testing is needed.**

The undergraduate student focus groups gave us very valuable information about how students conduct their research. We also learned valuable information about their attitudes towards the idea of a library subject or research guide. All the data that we gleaned from the groups indicate that our next step is additional usability testing of our actual guides. The issues of findability, labeling and general design need to be further explored through user tests.

- **Continue to emphasize the use of subject guides to faculty and graduate student instructors.**

It is clear that the most direct way to lead students to use a library subject or research guide is by having their instructor or GSI recommend it. When an instructor specifically recommends (or requires) the use of certain resources, students are sure to use them; this is most clearly demonstrated with course-specific guides. The more that faculty are aware of the existence of subject guides, and the opportunities for customization and integration with CTools, the better utilized they will be. Not only could instructors point students to appropriate guides, but librarians could insert links to course-related or subject guides from within CTools sites.

A related idea is to improve the branding and marketing of our guides. The fact that students continue to confuse the name "Mirlyn" with the library website as a whole attests to the strength of the Mirlyn brand. Branding the Library's guides with a similarly easily recognized name and/or logo could alleviate problems with their findability. While this recommendation falls outside of usability per se, we include it because branding and marketing have the potential to increase use and improve usability of the Library's guides.

- **Order of resources matters to students.**

Students want to find the best resources for the task at hand; having a priority ranking or "best bets" for individual resources near the top of a guide or near the top of the content boxes may help students navigate through a research guide.

## ***Lessons Learned***

### **What went well – logistics**

- **Targeting potential participants:** we targeted undergraduate students working as freshman orientation leaders over the summer as potential participants in the focus groups. Based on preliminary input from one of these students, we scheduled the focus groups early in the evenings, on a Wednesday and a Friday. An email was sent out to this group, and response was enthusiastic. The message was then forwarded by a staff member at the Office of New Student Programs to a transfer student group as well. Subject specialists also sent out messages to their departments (if appropriate). Several participants were recruited through these email groups.
- **Food:** in addition to \$10 in "Munchie Money" redeemable at University Unions, we provided participants with dinner, and asked each student to choose a particular sandwich before placing our catering order (through Potbelly's). This added buy-in may have contributed to the fact that there was only one student who failed to show-up.
- **Summer session:** it is possible that we got a strong response from undergraduates because students who are on campus during the summer may have fewer competing obligations – such as heavy course loads, student group participation – than they do during the fall or winter semesters.

- **Resources used:** One valuable resource in helping us develop and implement the focus groups was Focus Groups, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition by Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey (2000). The book is a practical, hands-on guide that was useful in designing the questions asked, planning the physical set-up and logistical preparations, and in suggesting effective moderator techniques.
- **Two note-takers:** for each focus group, two task force members acted as note-takers. This worked well; while we had audio recordings as backup, we did not have to rely on them (see problems with audio recordings, below). And, if one person missed an item in his/her notes, the other was likely to have recorded it.
- **Note-taking method:** In order to be able to quickly record everything that was being said by participants, the two note-takers developed a simple template. We used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, with 3 columns: the time a statement was made (in order to reference the audio recording if necessary), the person making the comment, and the comment itself. Using Excel simplified the ability to input each comment quickly, on subsequent rows of the spreadsheet. The note-takers agreed on numbering each person as they sat down around the table before the focus group began.

## Needs Improvement

- We used a digital recorder from Desktop Support Services in order to create an audio recording of each focus group session. In both instances, we had difficulty downloading the files and had to rely on DSS to do this for us. In one instance, the recording was cut off after 30 minutes.
- Possible effect of test design on findings: the potential for "group think" in the discussion groups we observed may have caused participants to express more agreement than they would if interviewed individually.



## **Appendix**

### **Test Script**

#### **Greetings:**

- (In the lobby) Names and majors
- How many of you have come in and used the library before?
- Where were you born?
- Ready for the semester? What will you do before semester starts?

#### **Introduction:**

- Rules, objectives, etc.
- State who we are, introduce selves, what we are doing
- "no right or wrong answers; we expect that you will have differing points of view"
- tape recording session; names not included in any reports; comments are confidential
- "interested in hearing from each of you"

Don't forget IRB forms!

#### **Questions:**

Topic: How do you do research?

- Think about the last paper you wrote. How did you find the information you needed to write it?
- When you are exploring a topic for a class paper or project that you know little or nothing about, how do you begin to find information?
- What do you like most about the resources (**that they just mentioned - give examples**) you currently use in your research? What do you like least?
- Do you use library resources when you're researching a project or paper? (**Clarify if all have different ideas of what library resources are**)
- How do you know which resources to use (or how do you know where to start)?

#### **Transition (label/terminology question)**

- If you saw a web page with a list of suggested resources focusing on a particular topic, what would you call it?
- If you saw the terms "subject guide" or "research guide" on the library website, what would you expect to see when you clicked on them?

#### **Follow-up Questions**

Ways to get at these topics:

**Would you rather have** (for example: long list of resources (more comprehensive) or a shorter list?)

**OR**

**How important to you is:**

**[Course-specificity]** How important is it to you to have a guide specific to your assignment or class versus a guide targeted more generally to a subject, like communication studies, engineering, etc. (**Note: if they say that they have used one in the past.**)

- **[Research strategy]** How important is it to you to have help about how to do research?
- **[All possible resources]** Would you rather have long list of resources (more comprehensive) or a more targeted/selective, shorter list?
- **[Descriptions/annotations]** How important are descriptions of each resource?
- **[Ranking]** How important is it to you to have resources ranked by importance or relevance?
- **[Consistency of types of resources]** How important is it to you to have different types of resources grouped together? For example, have all databases in one section, or books, journals, other media, etc.
- **[Fun factor]** How important is it to you that a guide be fun or interactive? What would make it fun? Interactive?
- **[Feedback]** How important to you is it that you can comment or provide feedback on a resource? How important is it to be able view other students' comments or feedback? (**Could use Amazon reviews as an example.**)

**Additional Questions (if time permits)**

- After having established what a subject/research guide is: How would you organize a subject guide on a particular topic? Would you group different items together (and if so, how)?
- Identify other resources (Ctools, blogs, etc.) you'd like listed/available on the page.
- Do you use/would you use/would you expect to see things like delicious tags, twitter or RSS feeds, youtube videos, blogs, etc as part of a subject guide?
- If you were to design a resource for research on a certain topic or for a specific assignment, what would it include? What features would it have? What would it look like?
- How much information is enough? Too much?